

# JOSIAH PERROTT COFFIN

Alan Perrott (401) investigates the PERROTT-COFFIN connection ...

I was recently asked by member **Shirley Davies (1010)** if I could find out anything more about her great-great-grandfather **Josiah PERROTT**. She knew that he was born in Bridport, Dorset, England and arrived in Melbourne, Australia in 1855. Shirley had been able to trace her family history from when **Josiah** arrived in Australia, but she knew very little of his life and ancestry in England. This sounded like it would be a straightforward search of the genealogy records in England, but it turned out that **Josiah** wasn't who he said he was and that he may have left behind some family secrets in England.

Shirley was able to tell me that **Josiah PERROTT** was a police constable in London before arriving in Melbourne on the *Caldera* on 7 March 1855 with his wife **Hannah nee PAYNE**. They travelled with their two sons – Shirley's great-grandfather **Frederick George PERROTT** (1851-1931) and **John PERROTT** (1854-1858). They also had an older son **Henry Sydney 'Harry' PERROTT** (1850-1907) who remained in England with his paternal grandmother where he is listed in the 1861 census. He went on to serve as a bugler in the British Army and seems to have re-joined his family in Australia sometime after that. **Harry** married **Annie Morton LAMB** in Mornington, Victoria on 17 March 1884.



The first surprise was that there is no record of a **Josiah PERROTT** in Dorset at this time. However, I did discover a **Josias Perrott COFFIN** who was baptised on 22 July 1821 in Bradpole, Dorset. His parents are listed as **George COFFIN** and **Elizabeth COFFIN** [England & Wales, Christening Index, 1530-1980]. This **Josias Perrott COFFIN** did indeed marry **Anna [Hannah] PAYNE** (1827-1911) in Allington, Dorset on 25 April 1847. Neither **Josiah** nor **Hannah** appear to have been able to write their names on the marriage certificate.

The next time that **Josiah** appears in a public record is in the 1851 census return where he is a 29-year old police constable living in Lambeth, Surrey with his wife **Hannah** and 1-year old son **Harry [Henry Sydney]**. **Josiah**'s place of birth is given as Bridport, Dorset. This all seems to match with Shirley's account – except that his name was actually **Josiah COFFIN** and not **Josiah PERROTT**.

Further research showed that **Josiah**'s parents **George COFFIN** and **Elizabeth PARROTT** were married on 21 July 1816 in Allington, Dorset. Again, both seem to have been illiterate so the spelling of the names can't be relied upon. **George** and **Elizabeth** had two children – **Josias Perrott COFFIN** who was baptised on 22 July 1821 in Bradpole, and **Harriet COFFIN** was baptised on 6 June 1825 in Allington, Dorset.

**George COFFIN** was baptised on 11 July 1790 in Bryanston, Dorset [Church of England Baptisms, 1538-1812]. His parents were **John COFFIN** and **Jane COX**. He was sentenced to prison several times after his marriage to **Elizabeth**. On 25 March 1823 he was sentenced to 3 months hard labour for leaving his wife and family. He is described as 25 years old, a married servant, 5'6 $\frac{1}{4}$ " tall, light brown hair, fair complexion, light hazel eyes, with gunpowder marks on his lips, chin and forehead.

He is sentenced to prison in Blandford on 21 March 1828 for leaving his family again. Described as a married servant aged 26, 5'6 $\frac{1}{4}$ " tall, with brown hair, grey eyes, fair complexion, with unsightly gunpowder marks on the left side of his upper lip.

On 17 October 1848 aged 51 he is sentenced in Dorset to 1 month imprisonment for 'larceny by servant'. This appears to have been for stealing a silver watch. **George** died in 1851 aged 56 and was buried on 10 April 1851 in Blandford, Dorset.

Further research shows that **Elizabeth** married **Joseph WARD** in Poole, Dorset on 8 February 1830. This is surprising – she was still married to **George COFFIN** and he did not die until much later in 1851.

Before the Matrimonial Causes Act 1857, divorce was only possible in England by an Act of Parliament, an option only really open to wealthy families and almost certainly not something that **George** or **Elizabeth** would have had the means to pursue. The record of **Elizabeth**'s second marriage in the parish register clearly states that she was a widow, but this doesn't seem to have been the case. Subsequent census returns indicate that this is the same **Elizabeth**. The census return of 1861 shows that her grandson **Henry Sydney PERROTT** (son of **Josiah**) is staying with them, but using the surname of **PERROTT** rather than **COFFIN**.

**Joseph** and **Elizabeth** went on to have two children of their own – **Mary Ann** (baptised in Poole on 6 February 1831) and **Joseph** (baptised 16 January 1833). **Elizabeth** died in Bridport in Q1 1873, her second husband **Joseph WARD** having died 2 years earlier in July 1871. Did **Elizabeth** marry **Joseph WARD** bigamously? Is she indeed the same **Elizabeth COFFIN**? Is the **George COFFIN** that she married the same one that was imprisoned for the third time in 1848 and died in 1851? It seems likely, and I can't find any record of another suitable **Elizabeth COFFIN** or **George COFFIN** in Dorset at this time. Does this explain why **Josiah** changed his surname from **COFFIN** to his mother's maiden name of **PERROTT**?

Regardless of what happened in the past, it is pleasing to report that **Josiah** and **Hannah** seem to have had a long and happy life in Victoria, and they died within a few days of each other in May 1911. Their son **Frederick George PERROTT** (Shirley's great-grandfather) was proprietor of F.G. Perrott butchers in Hastings, became a councillor and in 1905 was the Shire President for Frankston and Hastings – but that's another story!

